

An aerial photograph of the National Museum of the United States Air Force, showing its large, white, arched hangar-like structure and surrounding grounds. The image is darkened to serve as a background for the text.

85th Anniversary

**National Museum of the United States
Air Force
1923-2008**

**The predecessor of today's National
Museum
of the United States Air Force was
established
in October 1922 and first opened in
1923.**

**Since that year, the museum function
has existed, unbroken, making the Air
Force's national museum the oldest**

85th Anniversary

National Museum of the United States Air Force

• 1923-2008

**Click on the dates below
to learn more about the museum**

1910s

1920s

1930s

1940s

1950s

1960s

1970s

1980s

1990s

2000s

85th Anniversary

National Museum of the United States Air Force
• **1923-2008**



On Sept. 13, 1918, the U.S. Army Air Service renamed the Airplane Engineering Department at McCook Field as the Airplane Engineering Division. The division was tasked with designing and testing new Air Service equipment, improving old equipment, and the collection, classification and dissemination of technical information of value to the Air Service.

1918

1910s 1920s 1930s 1940s 1950s 1960s 1970s 1980s 1990s 2000s

85th Anniversary

National Museum of the United States Air Force

• 1923-2008



The Technical Data Section of the Engineering Division decided to create and maintain an aeronautical museum as an aid in the dissemination of information about the latest aircraft technology to the aircraft industry and designers. So in the spring of 1923, the Technical Data Section opened a small museum, covering 24,600 square feet in four buildings at the north end of McCook Field.

1923

1910s 1920s 1930s 1940s 1950s 1960s 1970s 1980s 1990s 2000s

85th Anniversary

National Museum of the United States Air Force

• 1923-2008



North and exterior view of
McCook Field Museum and
Armament Buildings in 1923.

1923

1910s 1920s 1930s 1940s 1950s 1960s 1970s 1980s 1990s 2000s

85th Anniversary

National Museum of the United States Air Force

• 1923-2008



Aircraft on display at McCook Field Museum in 1923. The primary goal of the museum was to assist aeronautical engineers by having the aircraft and their engines open for easy inspection.

1923

1910s 1920s 1930s 1940s 1950s 1960s 1970s 1980s 1990s 2000s

85th Anniversary

National Museum of the United States Air Force

• 1923-2008



Aircraft on display at McCook Field Museum in 1923 included (from left) DH-9A, LUSAC 11, DH-4, Sopwith TF.2 "Salamander" and Caudron R.11.

1923

1910s 1920s 1930s 1940s 1950s 1960s 1970s 1980s 1990s 2000s

85th Anniversary

National Museum of the United States Air Force
• 1923-2008



In 1926 the Army Air Service became the Army Air Corps, and organizational changes came to the museum. The Technical Data Section became a “branch” of the administration section, Materiel Division, and the museum became a unit of the Technical Data Section. In 1927 a physical change took place as everything moved from McCook Field to Wright Field. Many of the museum’s aircraft were destroyed rather than moved.

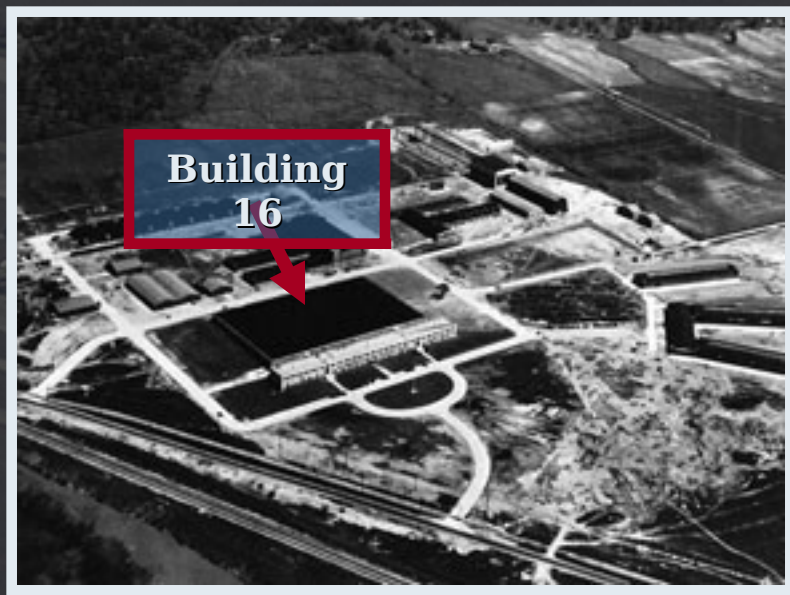
1926-1927

1910s 1920s 1930s 1940s 1950s 1960s 1970s 1980s 1990s 2000s

85th Anniversary

National Museum of the United States Air Force

• 1923-2008



From 1927 to 1934 the
“museum” was in the Wright
Field administration building.

1927-1934

1910s 1920s 1930s 1940s 1950s 1960s 1970s 1980s 1990s 2000s

85th Anniversary

National Museum of the United States Air Force

• 1923-2008



Finally, the Army Air Corps acted to formalize the museum. On Sept. 30, 1931, Army Regulation 95-40 established the Army Aeronautical Museum. This was the first official authorization of the museum. It was set up in the east end of Building 16, and it opened to the general public on July 1, 1932.

1931

1910s 1920s 1930s 1940s 1950s 1960s 1970s 1980s 1990s 2000s

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National Museum of the United States Air Force

• 1923-2008



**Lighter-than-air exhibits at
the Army Aeronautical
Museum in March 1934.**

1934

1910s

1920s

1930s

1940s

1950s

1960s

1970s

1980s

1990s

2000s

85th Anniversary

National Museum of the United States Air Force

• 1923-2008



The Nieuport 27 was one aircraft that came to the Army Aeronautical Museum. This photo was taken in March 1934.

1934

1910s 1920s 1930s 1940s 1950s 1960s 1970s 1980s 1990s 2000s

85th Anniversary

National Museum of the United States Air Force

• 1923-2008



Notice that behind the Army Aeronautical Museum, other lab work was being conducted, as shown in this March 1934 photo.

1934

1910s 1920s 1930s 1940s 1950s 1960s 1970s 1980s 1990s 2000s

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National Museum of the United States Air Force

• 1923-2008



**This March 1934 photo shows
the Berliner Joyce XP-16
fuselage at the Army
Aeronautical Museum.**

1934

1910s

1920s

1930s

1940s

1950s

1960s

1970s

1980s

1990s

2000s

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National Museum of the United States Air Force

• 1923-2008



In 1934 the Army convinced the Works Progress Administration to construct a new building, and the museum shared part of that building. In July 1935 the new Army Aeronautical Museum opened to the public.

1935

1910s 1920s 1930s 1940s 1950s 1960s 1970s 1980s 1990s 2000s

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National Museum of the United States Air Force

• 1923-2008



**Rotunda of the new Army
Aeronautical Museum.**



1935

1910s 1920s 1930s 1940s 1950s 1960s 1970s 1980s 1990s 2000s

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National Museum of the United States Air Force

• 1923-2008



Instruments display at the Army Aeronautical Museum in July 1936. Notice there was no attempt to interpret the artifacts for visitors.

1936

1910s 1920s 1930s 1940s 1950s 1960s 1970s 1980s 1990s 2000s

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National Museum of the United States Air Force

• 1923-2008



DH-4B and ZLB-6 bomber on display at the Army Aeronautical Museum in 1936. Note the checker-board fuselage on the DH-4B; this aircraft was on the 1920 Alaskan Flying Expedition (first flight to Alaska).

1936

1910s 1920s 1930s 1940s 1950s 1960s 1970s 1980s 1990s 2000s

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National Museum of the United States Air Force

• 1923-2008



By 1938 attendance had risen to almost 30,000 visitors per year.



1910s 1920s 1930s 1940s 1950s 1960s 1970s 1980s 1990s 2000s

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National Museum of the United States Air Force

• 1923-2008



The Works Progress Administration assigned professionals to build exhibits at the museum. Here, two men construct the model buildings for the Wright Field diorama.

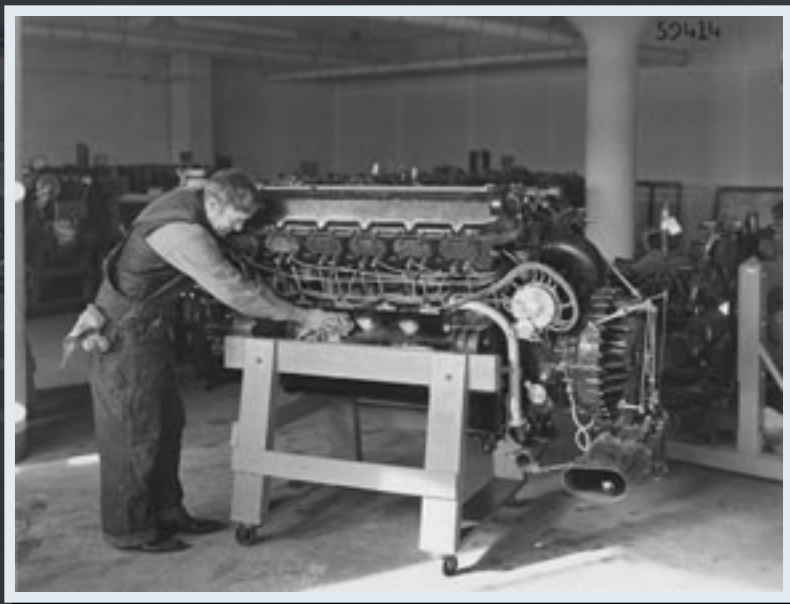
1940

1910s 1920s 1930s 1940s 1950s 1960s 1970s 1980s 1990s 2000s

85th Anniversary

National Museum of the United States Air Force

• 1923-2008



Other workmen restored aircraft and engines. This photo shows the Aero Engine, after being thoroughly cleaned and polished, is now ready for the painters.

1940

1910s 1920s 1930s 1940s 1950s 1960s 1970s 1980s 1990s 2000s

85th Anniversary

National Museum of the United States Air Force

• 1923-2008



Museum research staff in 1940.



1940

1910s 1920s 1930s 1940s 1950s 1960s 1970s 1980s 1990s 2000s

85th Anniversary

National Museum of the United States Air Force
• 1923-2008



World War II brought major change to the Army Aeronautical Museum. The museum was closed temporarily in 1939, and completely in 1940, to make room for office space. Although the museum function continued during and after the war, the artifacts went into storage and were scattered around the base. This photo shows Building 12 in 1942 after the Army Aeronautical Museum was closed to make room for office space.

1942

1910s 1920s 1930s 1940s 1950s 1960s 1970s 1980s 1990s 2000s

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National Museum of the United States Air Force

• 1923-2008



In 1944 General Hap Arnold decided to reopen the museum. Unfortunately, many of the artifacts had been poorly stored.

1944

1910s 1920s 1930s 1940s 1950s 1960s 1970s 1980s 1990s 2000s

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National Museum of the United States Air Force

• 1923-2008



Many of the aircraft had been moved outdoors and were destroyed. This photo shows the Alaska DH-4 and a Nieuport 27 just before they were burned in March 1945. Also lost was the *Bird of Paradise* and a replica of the Wrights' 1902 glider.

1945

1910s 1920s 1930s 1940s 1950s 1960s 1970s 1980s 1990s 2000s

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National Museum of the United States Air Force

• 1923-2008



On Jan. 2, 1948, HQ USAF issued Air Force Regulation 20-26 establishing the Air Force Technical Museum to create a repository for aeronautical equipment to be used for future study. The Technical Museum was housed in Building 89, a World War II engine shop, but tours were only by appointment.

1948

1910s 1920s 1930s 1940s 1950s 1960s 1970s 1980s 1990s 2000s

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National Museum of the United States Air Force
• 1923-2008



In 1952 the Air Force designated the Air Force Technical Museum as the USAF's central repository for Air Force historical properties, and in 1954 the Air Force Technical Museum at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, Ohio, became the USAF's primary museum. On April 1-2, 1955, the museum conducted an open house in Building 89 at Patterson Field as part of the formal opening of the museum to the public after being closed for 15 years.

1952

1910s 1920s 1930s 1940s 1950s 1960s 1970s 1980s 1990s 2000s

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National Museum of the United States Air Force

• 1923-2008



In 1956 the Air Force Technical Museum was redesignated the Air Force Central Museum, and in November 1957 the museum was redesignated again, this time as the Air Force Museum.

1956-1957

1910s 1920s 1930s 1940s 1950s 1960s 1970s 1980s 1990s 2000s

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National Museum of the United States Air Force

• 1923-2008



The museum was placed in an old facility, this time a World War II era structure, and many of the aircraft were put outside in a parking lot.

1956-1957

1910s 1920s 1930s 1940s 1950s 1960s 1970s 1980s 1990s 2000s

85th Anniversary

National Museum of the United States Air Force

• 1923-2008



**Visitors at the front desk of
the Air Force Museum.**

1960

1910s

1920s

1930s

1940s

1950s

1960s

1970s

1980s

1990s

2000s

85th Anniversary

National Museum of the United States Air Force

• 1923-2008



Although the museum was now open to the general public, it was housed in an old industrial building. The building was a fire hazard and not suitable for displaying airplanes. Also, the only interpretation of artifacts came from tour guides.

1960s

1910s

1920s

1930s

1940s

1950s

1960s

1970s

1980s

1990s

2000s

85th Anniversary

National Museum of the United States Air Force

• 1923-2008



Visiting youth groups received little formal educational instruction, and what educational programs the museum did offer seem to have been little more than "show and tell."

1960s

1910s

1920s

1930s

1940s

1950s

1960s

1970s

1980s

1990s

2000s

85th Anniversary

National Museum of the United States Air Force

• 1923-2008



The museum gradually improved. More aircraft were restored and added to the collection. However, space remained tight.

1960s

1910s 1920s 1930s 1940s 1950s 1960s 1970s 1980s 1990s 2000s

85th Anniversary

National Museum of the United States Air Force

• 1923-2008



Visitors enjoyed the Air Force Museum.



1960s

1910s

1920s

1930s

1940s

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1960s

1970s

1980s

1990s

2000s

85th Anniversary

National Museum of the United States Air Force

• 1923-2008



Children saw aircraft up close, and they could dream of joining the Air Force.

1960s

1910s

1920s

1930s

1940s

1950s

1960s

1970s

1980s

1990s

2000s

85th Anniversary

National Museum of the United States Air Force

• 1923-2008



As the displays became more interesting, the Air Force Museum became a learning resource for telling the history of the Air Force.



1960s

1910s 1920s 1930s 1940s 1950s 1960s 1970s 1980s 1990s 2000s

85th Anniversary

National Museum of the United States Air Force

• 1923-2008



Floor space in the museum remained limited. Meanwhile, donation of artifacts and archival material continued, despite the small collection management and research staffs.

1960s

1910s

1920s

1930s

1940s

1950s

1960s

1970s

1980s

1990s

2000s

85th Anniversary

National Museum of the United States Air Force

• 1923-2008



Also, as the Air Force went into space, so did the Air Force Museum. The earliest space artifacts remained relatively small, but they were soon joined by very large items.

1960s

1910s

1920s

1930s

1940s

1950s

1960s

1970s

1980s

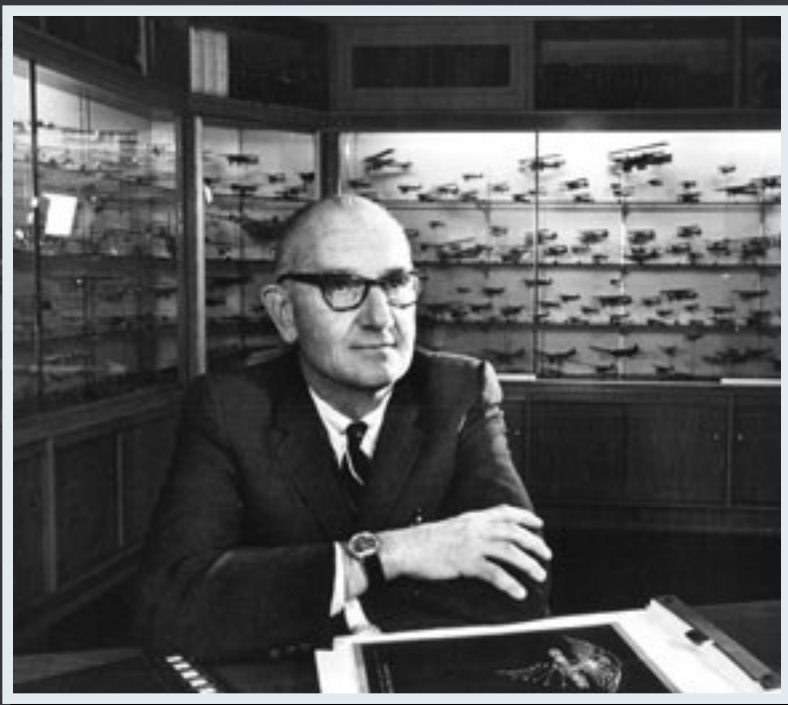
1990s

2000s

85th Anniversary

National Museum of the United States Air Force

• 1923-2008



In 1961 the state of Ohio chartered the non-profit Air Force Museum Foundation to raise money for a new museum building. Eugene W. Kettering (pictured here) was fundamental in fundraising for the new building.

1961

1910s

1920s

1930s

1940s

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1980s

1990s

2000s

85th Anniversary

National Museum of the United States Air Force

• 1923-2008



In 1962 the official Air Force Museum emblem was approved.

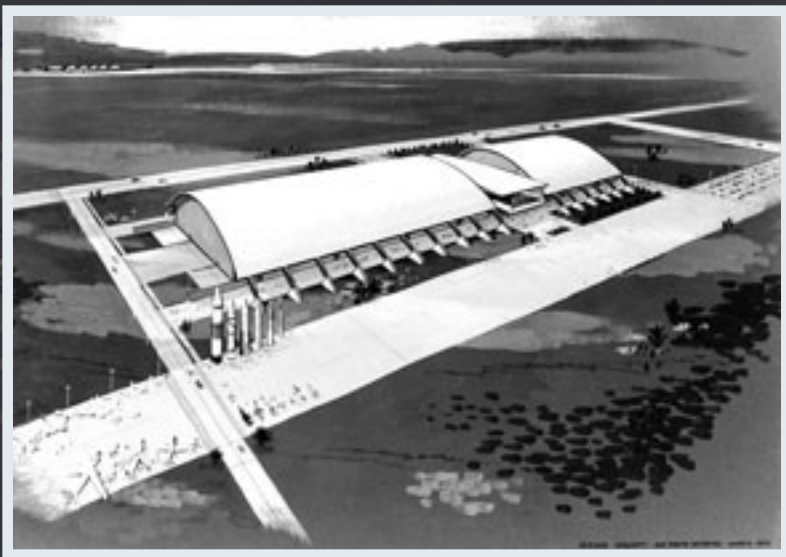
1962

1910s 1920s 1930s 1940s 1950s 1960s 1970s 1980s 1990s 2000s

85th Anniversary

National Museum of the United States Air Force

• 1923-2008



Although a number of different plans were submitted for the new building, the Foundation chose the “hangar” design by Pascoe Steel that we know today.

1963

1910s 1920s 1930s 1940s 1950s 1960s 1970s 1980s 1990s 2000s

85th Anniversary

National Museum of the United States Air Force

• 1923-2008



"X" marked the spot where construction began on the new Air Force Museum building in 1970.

1970

1910s 1920s 1930s 1940s 1950s 1960s 1970s 1980s 1990s 2000s

85th Anniversary

National Museum of the United States Air Force

• 1923-2008



The first arch went up in August 1970, and in September the roof started going on.

1970

1910s 1920s 1930s 1940s 1950s 1960s 1970s 1980s 1990s 2000s

85th Anniversary

National Museum of the United States Air Force

• 1923-2008



The B-36J was backed into the building in December 1970.

1970

1910s

1920s

1930s

1940s

1950s

1960s

1970s

1980s

1990s

2000s

85th Anniversary

National Museum of the United States Air Force

• 1923-2008



In the spring of 1971 the rest of the aircraft were moved to the new building.



1971

1910s 1920s 1930s 1940s 1950s 1960s 1970s 1980s 1990s 2000s

85th Anniversary

National Museum of the United States Air Force

• 1923-2008



**President Richard Nixon
dedicated the new building in
September 1971.**

1971

1910s

1920s

1930s

1940s

1950s

1960s

1970s

1980s

1990s

2000s

85th Anniversary

National Museum of the United States Air Force

• 1923-2008



Even though the facility gave the Air Force Museum more room, some aircraft remained outside, which meant thinking about a new building.

1971

1910s 1920s 1930s 1940s 1950s 1960s 1970s 1980s 1990s 2000s

85th Anniversary

National Museum of the United States Air Force

• 1923-2008



In 1972 the Air Force Museum received its restoration hangars to care for its growing collection of aircraft.

1972

1910s

1920s

1930s

1940s

1950s

1960s

1970s

1980s

1990s

2000s

85th Anniversary

National Museum of the United States Air Force

• 1923-2008



In 1977 the museum got Hangars 1 and 9, which today house the Presidential and Research & Development Galleries.

1977

1910s 1920s 1930s 1940s 1950s 1960s 1970s 1980s 1990s 2000s

85th Anniversary

National Museum of the United States Air Force

• 1923-2008



The museum continued to grow.

1970s

1910s

1920s

1930s

1940s

1950s

1960s

1970s

1980s

1990s

2000s

85th Anniversary

National Museum of the United States Air Force

• 1923-2008



In December 1981 the museum was redesignated as the United States Air Force Museum.

1981

1910s 1920s 1930s 1940s 1950s 1960s 1970s 1980s 1990s 2000s

85th Anniversary

National Museum of the United States Air Force

• 1923-2008



Construction on the second building began in 1986.

1986

1910s 1920s 1930s 1940s 1950s 1960s 1970s 1980s 1990s 2000s

85th Anniversary

National Museum of the United States Air Force

• 1923-2008



**The second building opened
in 1988.**

1988

1910s

1920s

1930s

1940s

1950s

1960s

1970s

1980s

1990s

2000s

85th Anniversary

National Museum of the United States Air Force

• 1923-2008



In 1990 work started on the new 500-seat IMAX Theatre and the Atrium.

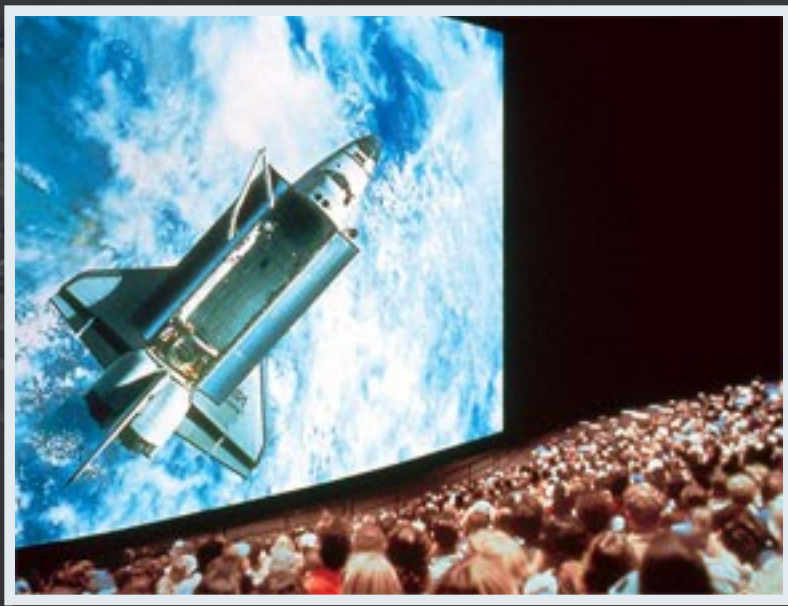
1990

1910s 1920s 1930s 1940s 1950s 1960s 1970s 1980s 1990s 2000s

85th Anniversary

National Museum of the United States Air Force

• 1923-2008



The new IMAX Theatre and Atrium were completed in 1991.

1991

1910s

1920s

1930s

1940s

1950s

1960s

1970s

1980s

1990s

2000s

85th Anniversary

National Museum of the United States Air Force

• 1923-2008



In 1998 the museum relocated its artifacts, archives and exhibit fabrication into Building 5, a building previously used as an aircraft modification facility.

1998

1910s 1920s 1930s 1940s 1950s 1960s 1970s 1980s 1990s 2000s

85th Anniversary

National Museum of the United States Air Force

• 1923-2008



In 2001 the museum broke ground for the Eugene W. Kettering Cold War Gallery.

2001

1910s

1920s

1930s

1940s

1950s

1960s

1970s

1980s

1990s

2000s

85th Anniversary

National Museum of the United States Air Force

• 1923-2008



**On May 3, 2002, the first arch
of the third building went up.**

2002

1910s

1920s

1930s

1940s

1950s

1960s

1970s

1980s

1990s

2000s

85th Anniversary

National Museum of the United States Air Force

• 1923-2008



While work continued, the B-36J came out of the first building into the sunlight for the first time in 30 years.

2002

1910s 1920s 1930s 1940s 1950s 1960s 1970s 1980s 1990s 2000s

85th Anniversary

National Museum of the United States Air Force

• 1923-2008



The restoration staff worked hard to get the rest of the aircraft ready for display, and they moved them into the third building as soon as the builders let them.

2002-2003

1910s 1920s 1930s 1940s 1950s 1960s 1970s 1980s 1990s 2000s

85th Anniversary

National Museum of the United States Air Force

• 1923-2008



The Hall of Missiles was completed in January 2004, making it possible to display the museum's missiles indoors.

2004

1910s 1920s 1930s 1940s 1950s 1960s 1970s 1980s 1990s 2000s

85th Anniversary

National Museum of the United States Air Force

• 1923-2008



Today's museum is far different than the first one in 1923. First, the museum's exhibits are modern with meaningful displays. More importantly, the museum has a much greater purpose than its predecessors had.

2000s

1910s 1920s 1930s 1940s 1950s 1960s 1970s 1980s 1990s 2000s

85th Anniversary

National Museum of the United States Air Force

• 1923-2008



Education of a broad audience is a primary focus of today's museum, from the smallest visitors to educational programs for school and youth groups to programs for adults.

2000s

1910s

1920s

1930s

1940s

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1960s

1970s

1980s

1990s

2000s

85th Anniversary

National Museum of the United States Air Force

• 1923-2008



Stewardship is another major emphasis at the museum. The proper archival methods are used to care for hundreds of thousands of photographs and documents. Modern conservation techniques and the proper cataloguing and storage methods are used to preserve priceless artifacts.

2000s

1910s

1920s

1930s

1940s

1950s

1960s

1970s

1980s

1990s

2000s

85th Anniversary

National Museum of the United States Air Force

• 1923-2008



Together, these facets make the museum truly a world-class institution, drawing worldwide attention and explaining why the museum was redesignated as the National Museum of the United States Air Force in 2004.



2000s

1910s 1920s 1930s 1940s 1950s 1960s 1970s 1980s 1990s 2000s

85th Anniversary

National Museum of the United States Air Force
• 1923-2008



The National Museum of the United States Air Force is now in the middle of a long-term, multi-phase expansion program. Future plans call for a Space Gallery, Presidential Aircraft Interpretive Center, Education Center, Collection Management and Conservation facility, an additional entrance and more parking.

Future Plans

1910s 1920s 1930s 1940s 1950s 1960s 1970s 1980s 1990s 2000s